

## In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv – July 7, 2021

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### 1. Office Safety – 7 Tips

We often don't think of the office environment as having workplace hazards. While office workers are at lower risk of workplace injuries than other categories of worker at UNL, it is still important to consider safety. Here are 7 tips:

- **Make sure your desk/computer setup is ergonomic.** Maintain a neutral position with head centered over neck and shoulders, wrists flat, elbows resting comfortably at your side. Use a footrest if your feet don't touch the ground.
- **Take regular breaks to get up and move around.** Sitting all day can lead to health problems.
- **When it is slippery due to rain, ice, snow, walk like a penguin.** Slips and falls in parking lots are common, in particular in winter or rainy weather.
- **Use a headset for prolonged or frequent phone use.** Cradling the phone can cause neck and back pain.
- **Keep your workplace tidy.** Clean spills immediately; keep aisles free of clutter; keep drawers closed between uses; tie up or otherwise secure cords, especially those in walkways as they pose a trip hazard.
- **Don't let electrical cords create a fire risk.** Do not run electrical cords through windows and doorways or under rugs/carpets/mats. Do not fasten cords with unapproved devices such as staples. Use extension cords only for temporary applications. Use surge protectors for low amperage applications. Do not use extension cords or surge protectors in series.
- **Know your office emergency procedures.** Make sure you know what to do in the event of natural or man-made emergencies such as fire, tornado, intruder or medical emergency. Know the location of your area's AED.

Environmental Health and Safety maintains a number of Safe Operating Procedures relevant to office workers. Review those and the other resources provided to help ensure you stay safe in any office workspace.

## Resources

- *Top seven safety tips for office workers*. SFM Mutual Insurance. (2021, April 2). <https://www.sfmic.com/safety-tips-for-office-workers/>
- *Workplace ergonomics: Tips for neutral posture*. SFM Mutual Insurance. (n.d.). <https://www.sfmic.com/workplace-ergonomics-for-neutral-posture/>
- *Get up and move: Prevent strain and pain*. SFM Mutual Insurance. (2020, October 29). <https://www.sfmic.com/safety/prevent-strain-and-pain/>
- *Winter slips and falls: Avoid common hazards*. SFM Mutual Insurance. (2020, October 29). <https://www.sfmic.com/safety/avoid-winter-slips-and-falls/>.
- *Office worker safety resources*. SFM Mutual Insurance. (2020, November 19). <https://www.sfmic.com/safety/office/>
- EHS Safe Operating Procedures (SOPs)
  - General/Other (several) <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/general>
  - Emergency Preparedness (several) <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/emergency-preparedness>
  - Ergonomics (several) <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/ergonomics>
  - Heat Stress (several) <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/heat-stress>

## 2. Safety Shorts – Office Safety

This section features links to short safety resource(s). Provided this month are resources related to office safety:

- Office Safety Training (Sam Powell, 2:37 min)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noiQckyioVE>
- Slips, Trips & Falls – The Fatal Half Inch – Safety Training Video (Safety Memos, 4.26 min)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H\\_iYaQSJTdc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_iYaQSJTdc)
- Quick Inspections – Safety Training Video – Inspect Workplace: Prevent Accidents (Safety Memos, 2:43 min)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0Rk-elzsuk>

NOTE: Resources are provided for informational purposes only. Publication does not in any way affect current UNL policies and procedures.

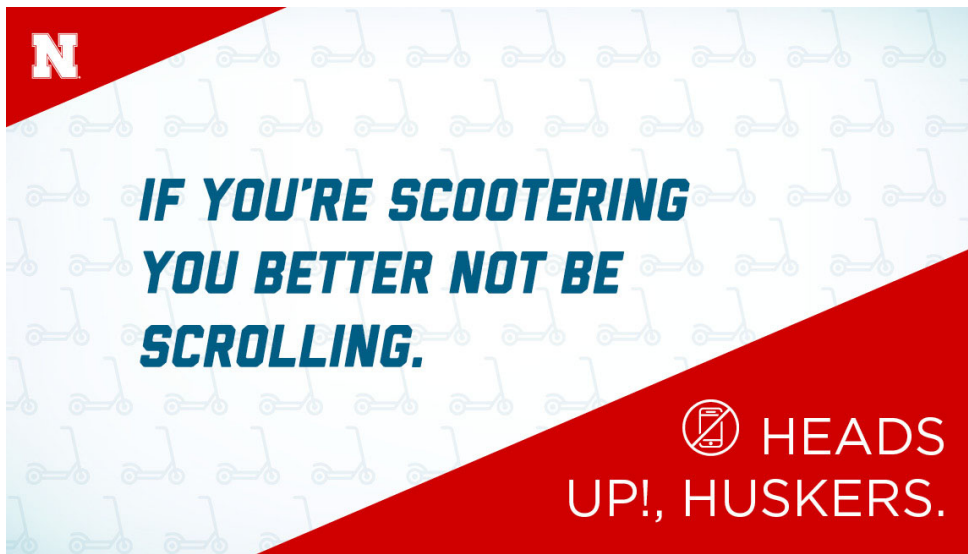
### 3. Situational Preparedness - 7 Deadly Distractions – Heads Up!

Situational preparedness is so important that we will be looking at various aspects over time, as well as providing resources to assist you to “be prepared” for whatever situations you may encounter while driving, bicycling, walking or using scooters, skateboards and other such equipment.

The video, “7 Deadly Distractions,” provides a short review of what NOT to do while operating any motor vehicle to avoid injury or death.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdS6Mb6oAiw>). Keep your head “up and facing forward” and brain on task.

Here are the latest Heads Up! graphics highlighted for July & August:





Heads Up! graphics are available for download from the EHS website (<https://ehs.unl.edu/heads-up-graphics>). They are also available through the UNL Digital Content Library or EHS will provide an electronic file suitable for electronic display boards at UNL. To request a file, contact EHS by phone (402.472.4925) or email ([ehs@unl.edu](mailto:ehs@unl.edu)).

#### **4. Academic Lab Safety: Important Reminders**

2020 was an unusual year for the university and research laboratories, with changes in access to buildings/labs and the subsequent impact on academic research. EHS services were continually available throughout 2020 and early 2021 although regular Laboratory Safety and Compliance Surveys were temporarily on hold. As EHS has resumed routine visits to laboratories, we've noted several concerns.

One concern relates to decommissioning either labs and/or equipment labeled and designated for radioactive materials or biological materials use.

- Radioactive (Rad) material stickers or Biological (Bio) equipment labels may not be removed or covered up without contacting EHS to update the appropriate documentation required by applicable licenses/regulatory requirements/protocols.
- Designated Rad benchtop work areas may only be changed in consultation with EHS to ensure all such areas are correctly labeled/documented and previously used work areas are properly decontaminated.

- Equipment labeled for Rad or Bio use may not be disposed without first working with EHS to ensure appropriate decontamination and updating of protocols.
- Removing Rad or Bio labeling from equipment/area without consulting and working with EHS does not change the “regulatory” designation of the equipment/area.
- Ventilated cabinets designated for either Rad and/or Bio use may not have the Rad/Bio labels defaced and the cabinet disposed without contacting EHS. Decommissioning by EHS is required.

A second area of concern relates to general laboratory safety. Following are a few deficiencies that we’ve noted recently:

- Used/spent/unwanted chemicals were not properly labeled.
- Caps were left off chemical containers.
- Chemical containers were not labeled/not correctly labeled.

All research lab workers should inspect their laboratories to detect and correct uncontrolled hazards. EHS provides a checklist to guide this effort ([https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-SAG\\_chemical\\_lab.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-SAG_chemical_lab.pdf)).

EHS also recommends lab workers review applicable program requirements to ensure adherence to regulatory requirements (for example, Radiation Safety license/registration, Biosafety IBC-approved protocols, and applicable EHS Safe Operating Procedures and EHS web-based training).

## Resources

- A. Dana, M. (2020). A review and critique of academic lab safety research. *NATURE CHEMISTRY*, 12, 17–25. Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of Windsor, Windsor, ON, Canada, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41557-019-0375-x>
- **Laboratory Decommissioning EHS SOP** [https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-lab\\_decom.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-lab_decom.pdf)
- **Biological Decontamination of Laboratory Equipment SOP** [https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-bio-decontamination\\_lab equip.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-bio-decontamination_lab equip.pdf)
- **Hazardous/Radioactive Material Collection Procedures SOP** [https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-chem\\_collection\\_procedures.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-chem_collection_procedures.pdf)
- **Safety & Compliance Survey Guidelines for Laboratories SOP** [https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-SAG\\_chemical\\_lab.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-SAG_chemical_lab.pdf)

## 5. Near Misses at UNL

In reviewing near miss incidents, we hope that readers can reflect on their own work areas, equipment, and habits to see if they are placing themselves at risk of injury or illness. Following are two examples of near misses reported to EHS that could have been avoided by appropriate PPE:

- While washing an acetone squirt bottle in a chemical lab, a drop of acetone hit a part of the worker's eye not covered by safety glasses. Safety goggles use could have mitigated the hazard.
- While weighing out a reagent, some of the reagent "popped into" the worker's eye. Protective eyewear should be used when working with any chemical.

Following are some examples of near misses reported to EHS that could have been avoided by following procedure (not all related to chemical use):

- Two separate near misses were reported that resulted in chemical exposure by contact with a contaminated surface. Housekeeping, proper lab attire (gloves, long sleeved lab coats), and proper technique could have prevented these incidents. In one case a person leaned their arm on a contaminated counter; in the other incident the person rested their arm on the surface inside a chemical fume hood.
- Two separate instances were reported related to research equipment set-up. In one instance a separatory funnel set-up was incorrectly assembled. In another instance a syringe/needle being used for THF transfer was not thoroughly inspected for security prior to use and THF squirted out between the needle and syringe. Both of these situations resulted in chemical exposures.
- One worker tried to catch a glass beaker that had just hit the edge of the lab bench, broken, and was falling to the floor. A cut hand resulted from attempting a "catch" the falling object rather than letting it fall to the floor.
- One person using a drill press held the material with their hands rather than using clamps to stabilize the material. The result was a cut thumb.
- One person was operating a forklift on an icy ramp without determining ahead of time that the surface was safe to traverse. Lack of traction compromised braking and steering. Luckily the forklift stayed upright so neither the driver nor bystanders were injured.

## 6. Near Miss or Close Call?

The Chancellor's University Safety Committee (CUSC) is reaffirming their goal to focus more intensely on Near Miss/Close Call reporting and to also

encourage reporting of unsafe practices. To support that effort, the EHS “*Near Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form*” allows for reporting of unsafe practices.

By reporting all of these circumstances, near misses, often thought of as “close calls,” or unsafe practices, you are contributing to a safer and healthier campus environment. Information reported is shared throughout the University for educational/awareness purposes. Specific identifying information (e.g., names, departments, etc.) is not included in informational publications. Participation will benefit the entire campus community. Be assured that there is no risk of repercussions for reporting a situation or hazard.

A “near miss” can also be viewed as a “near hit!” Next time you see something and think, “This could have ended up very badly,” report that online to help your fellow workers throughout the university stay safe.

## Resources

- Near-Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form  
<https://ehs.unl.edu/near-missclose-call-incident-reporting-form>

## 7. In the Spotlight

EHS has started a new “Spotlight,” feature on the EHS home page (<https://ehs.unl.edu/>) to introduce the campus community to EHS staff, highlight selected seasonal safety topics and more. The Spotlight may be found immediately below the listing of EHS program areas and to the left of the “Report an Accident or Near-Miss” black box. The Spotlight is updated every 2-4 weeks so visit often.

## THINK SAFETY – DON’T LEARN BY ACCIDENT!

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